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RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000463

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CE, NEA/ELA; PASS TO NSC STERLING

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LO](#) [EU](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIAN FM MOALLEM'S VISIT TO BRATISLAVA

Classified By: Political-Economic Chief, Susan Ball, for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary. At the SARG's request, Syrian FM Moallem stopped in Bratislava on September 30 for a meeting with Foreign Minister Kubis en route to Damascus from the UNGA. According to Klara Novotna, Director of the MFA Office for Middle East and African Affairs, FM Kubis raised with Moallem the need for greater openness regarding its nuclear program, cautioned him about the deployment of troops near the Lebanese border, and called for progress on the domestic human rights front. According to Novotna, the atmospherics of the meeting were good, and the Slovak Government confirmed that it wants to expand educational and economic ties with Syria and would be open to a possible visit by President Asad to Bratislava after the Slovak Presidential elections in April. FM Moallem also met briefly with Deputy Prime Minister Caplovic. End Summary.

¶2. (C) PolEcon Chief met on October 9 with Ambassador Klara Novotna, newly-appointed director of the MFA's Middle East and Africa Bureau. Novotna noted that prior to a two-hour long meeting that including MFA personnel, FM Kubis met briefly one-on-one with FM Moallem. During the tete-a-tete, Kubis raised the need for better Syrian cooperation with the IAEA and the presence of Syrian troops near the Lebanese border. According to Novotna, Moallem apparently told Kubis that the Syrian troops had no "special task." With regard to IAEA investigations, Moallem claimed that Syria had been very open, allowing samples to be collected, but adding that Syria would not allow access to military sites in the absence of "evidence." Moallem also questioned why the U.S. had not made its charges immediately after the site was bombed, because the time lapse had created suspicions that the SARG had used the intervening 6 months to hide evidence. Kubis reportedly rebuffed the question, making clear that this was not a salient issue; SARG-IAEA cooperation was. Kubis also stressed that relations between Slovakia and Syria would be negatively affected if the Syrians didn't address satisfactorily IAEA requests.

¶3. (C) Novotna recounted that Moallem, in response to Kubis's request that the SARG take more seriously the human rights issues that the EU has raised, stated that SARG-EU working groups were already discussing issues such as the death penalty and freedom of the media and the SARG was open to dialogue on any topic. Moallem did not, however, offer any specific pledges or examples of progress.

¶4. (C) Moallem reportedly asked for a more active and visible EU presence in support of Turkish-sponsored diplomatic efforts, which he hoped would lead to direct talks between

Syria and Israel. He repeated familiar SARG positions on the elements of a comprehensive Middle East peace and also noted that Syria would like to develop strategic cooperation with Iran. Moallem also offered his views on how to deal with President Ahmadinejad, reportedly telling Kubis that the West had not been mindful of the "Persian" mentality when it made its overly generous offer to Iran. Moallem argued that the offer was so generous -- particularly given the lack of Iranian forthcomingness -- that it had been "offensive" to Ahmadinejad. FM Kubis countered that Persian culture and habits aside, both parties must approach this urgent issue with pragmatism. The EU had done that, and it was Ahmadinejad's responsibility to respond in kind. Moallem added that most Iranians, even moderates, believe that the government's nuclear program is essential to energy independence and that the EU needs to do a better job countering that argument.

15. (C) Regarding Iraq, Moallem complained that the EU should provide Syria with more assistance to help deal with presence of large numbers of Iraqi refugees. (Moallem repeated this point in the subsequent joint press conference.) In response to FM Kubis's question regarding SARG-Russian relations, Moallem stated that despite close ties between the two countries, Syria would not recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Similarly, Syria would not recognize Kosovo's independence; each case, according to Moallem, constituted a violation of international law. Moallem added, however, that Russia had been "provoked" by the international community's stance on Kosovo.

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16. (C) Novotna explained that while the GOS was open to future high-level visits, the Foreign Minister had clarified to the Syrians that a presidential visit could not be contemplated until after the Slovak Presidential elections. President Gasparovic, during a recent meeting with his Austrian counterpart, apparently agreed in principle to linking an Asad visit to Vienna with one to Bratislava sometime in the Spring. Kubis stressed to Moallem that such an invitation would not be issued until after the April presidential elections. Comment: the Slovaks have long advocated the need for dialogue with the SARG and clearly welcomed the visit. Novotna made clear, however, that the GOS would continued to raise the tough issues with SARG official and harbored no illusions that enough progress on those key issues -- from human rights to support of terrorism -- had been made.  
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